

SAFETY BULLETIN – Outdoor Cooking

Warmer weather means that people are cooking outdoors more. However, outdoor cooking, whether it involves using a charcoal or gas grill or an open campfire, requires special safety precautions. Below are some outdoor cooking safety tips courtesy of the Minnesota Safety Council and the National Safety Council.

- Always make sure the cooking surface of the grill is clean. Use a steel wool kitchen scrubbing pad or a brush to remove any baked-on food residue. Rinse thoroughly with water after scrubbing. Avoid using chemicals or cleaning solutions as they may react to the heat.
- Keep your grill on a level surface away from anything flammable. Supervise children when cooking outdoors and keep them away from the grill or fire. Never leave a grill or fire unattended.
- Avoid wearing loose or baggy clothing. Wear an apron made of fire resistant material and use long-handled equipment when cooking.
- Line the bottom of the barbecue with aluminum foil covered by an inch of ash, to absorb any grease drippings. Stack charcoal in a pyramid at the center of the grill.
- Only use lighter fluid specifically for charcoal and never squirt starter fluid on a fire or hot coals. The chemical's contact with heat can cause a flare-up and the potential for severe burns. Never use kerosene, gasoline or other petrochemicals to start charcoal. These chemicals are highly volatile and create toxic fumes. In addition, these chemicals can penetrate the food and are poisonous if ingested. If cooking over an open campfire never use any of the above chemicals to start a fire.
- Once coals have soaked in the lighter fluid (approximately 1 minute), throw a lighted match in the center or use a long fireplace match. Never use a cigarette lighter to start either charcoal or a campfire. After the coals have become covered with ash (approximately 1/2 hour) use a long handled non-flammable poker to spread them out evenly. They are now ready for cooking. Replace food rack and begin.
- Always keep water close at hand to douse a fire in case of a sudden flare up, even if you are using a propane gas grill. When cooking outdoors at home, bring a fire extinguisher within reach of the cooking area.
- When finished, douse a charcoal grill or campfire with water and close the grill vents. Smother an open campfire with sand or dirt. Allow the coals to cool overnight and dispose of coals and embers properly, preferably in a non-flammable container.
- Never burn charcoal indoors or in a tent - lethal concentrations of carbon monoxide could build up.
- When building a campfire, make sure the fire pit is large enough to contain the fire. Avoid building fires on windy days. Check with the Fire Marshal for any restrictions regarding open fires and to obtain any necessary permits.
- If you use a propane gas grill, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions on proper maintenance and how to check for leaks. You can use your gas grill all year round, but if you choose not to in the winter there are a few options for safely ending your grilling season. If you remove the propane tank, make sure it is properly plugged and stored away from the living areas of the house in a garage or shed. Another option is to empty the tank after your final grilled meal by simply letting the gas burn away.

